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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
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SUBJECT: ONE MORE BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LIST FOR PARLIAMENT

Thanks Embassy for Kozulin Advocacy

11. (SBU) Charge and A/DCM met April 9 with opposition politician Sergey Skrebets. Skrebets, who formerly served as counsel to political prisoner and former presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin, thanked the Charge for the Embassy's work to gain Kozulin's freedom. He told Charge of a draft letter of thanks addressed to the Department which Kozulin's current lawyer intends to pass to Kozulin for his signature during a prison visit April 26 (but did not share a copy with us). Though pleased with USG advocacy on Kozulin's behalf, Skrebets told Charge that he held out no hope that Kozulin would be released before parliamentary elections tentatively scheduled for September 28. [Note: Kozulin is not a member of BSDG, and may not agree with the idea that Skrebets is representing him at this time. End note.]

Own List for Parliament, Candidacy for President

12. (SBU) Skrebets, who is one of the leaders of Stanislav Shushkevich's Belarusian Social Democratic Gramada (BSDG), told Charge that his party had formed its own slate of candidates for 2008 elections to the Belarusian legislature. He provided Charge a letter requesting assistance for the campaign. BSDG will run candidates in 60 of Belarus' 110 districts. In answer to a question from the Charge on coordination with the United Democratic Forces' (UDF) unified candidate list, Skrebets noted that only two of sixty BSDG candidates were on the UDF list as well; 58 had been nominated by his party alone. He said that BSDG had hoped to field its own candidates in all 110 of Belarus' electoral districts but some party members who could have made strong candidates asked not to be nominated for fear of losing their jobs.

13. (SBU) As for future plans, Skrebets told Charge that he would be BSDG's candidate for president in 2011. According to Skrebets, in addition to the BSDG, his candidacy has the support of the Kalinovskiy Youth Movement, the Respublika faction and the Chernobyl liquidators' NGO. As BSDG's candidate, Skrebets said that he plans to visit the U.S. in May or June of 2008 and requested Embassy support to set up meetings in the Department, including with DRL A/S David Kramer. Charge responded that the Embassy would communicate his desire for meetings in the Department and would help to arrange such meetings in the event that he travels to Washington.

Comment

14. (SBU) It is unfortunate that a third opposition group plans to run a slate of candidates in this September's parliamentary polls.

As post has indicated to interlocutors on many occasions, multiple lists not only force candidates to contend among themselves for scarce resources, but also divide the opposition electorate and make it harder to substantiate claims of election falsification by the regime.

Moore
Cloud